

IT'S GOOD BUSINESS TO

PREPARED BY THE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH
NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH
BETHESDA 14, MARYLAND

KNOW YOUR MEN!

AS A FOREMAN OR SUPERVISOR in an industrial plant, you deal directly with a number of people in your everyday work. How well your work gets done depends, in large part, on how well you get along together. This is just plain common sense. So is the fact that in order for a group to get along well together, there must be mutual understanding. The foreman or supervisor needs to know his subordinates as individuals—people with private lives, with families and personal problems, with a lifetime of past experiences and a set of aspirations for the future that affect how they behave in the work group. The foreman, or supervisor, of course, is a separate and distinct individual too. He has his own personal likes and dislikes, his own private problems and aspirations that he brings to the job. And, as in the case of the workers under him, what happens on the job often has a strong effect on how he behaves with his family and friends after he gets home in the evening.



But there is a big difference. The behavior of the foreman or supervisor—the way he acts on the job—is likely to be of greater importance to more people than is true of other workers. But the foreman or supervisor, like everyone else, will have personal problems that he will bring to work with him sometimes. If, however, he can recognize and accept that he is feeling angry or out-of-sorts because of these problems, he then may be able to take responsibility for these feelings and separate them from his attitudes toward his fellow-workers. On the other hand, if he is not aware why he is feeling angry, overcritical, depressed, or otherwise uncomfortable, he may tend to push his subordinates around. This will make them resentful, will lower morale, and production and efficiency will suffer. Gruff or overcritical behavior on the part of the foreman or supervisor may make an employee feel, correctly or incorrectly, that he is being discriminated against, or that he isn't considered a

worthwhile worker, or that he does not have security on the job. Besides the difficulties that this kind of situation leads to on the job, these feelings of resentment or insecurity may be carried back into the home after work, and may lead to further difficulties in living on the part of the employee.

A good worker is a mentally healthy worker. People who are mentally healthy feel comfortable about themselves. They neither underestimate nor overestimate their abilities, and can accept their own shortcomings. They feel able to deal with most situations that come their way, and are not bowled over by disappointments or by their own uncontrolled emotions. They have self-respect and respect for others. The mentally healthy person is able to establish personal relationships that are lasting and satisfying, and is able to be a productive member of the group.

The average person expects to get certain basic satisfactions from his work. He wants to feel secure

in the job—to feel that he is needed and wanted, that he “belongs,” that his livelihood is protected. The average person wants recognition. He needs to feel that his efforts are appreciated, that his contributions will bring approbation from his supervisor and fellow-workers. In addition to security, self-esteem, and a sense of companionship, the average person needs opportunity for growth. He needs to get satisfaction from his job, a feeling that he is developing and improving his skills, that he is producing things that have meaning and use for others at the same time that he is preparing himself for more important work.

The foreman or supervisor, because of his position in industry, is a key person in promoting mental health. Psychiatrists and mental health experts have long recognized that the mental health of a person depends to a great extent on how he gets along in the work situation. If things are right, he gets a great sense of personal well-being and satis-



faction out of the job. He feels that he belongs, that he has a place as a person as well as a worker in the plant. The foreman or supervisor plays a large part in seeing that things go well, in providing a healthy environment at work. By his attitude, by the way he conducts himself and deals with his men on the job, he determines whether the work group is a smooth-running and harmonious unit all pulling together.

What are some of the things that a foreman or supervisor can do to create such a situation? How do other people want to be treated? First, of course, they want to be accepted and respected as they are—as unique individuals with special abilities and differences. They expect direction and support from the foreman or supervisor. They want to know what is expected of them, and to be given the necessary assistance in achieving the required goal.

The supervisor is pleased when his superior gives

him recognition for a job well-done. He expects criticism when his work is not satisfactory, but he would like it to be constructive—including suggestions for correcting the deficiencies—and he would prefer it to be given in private. The men who work under the supervisor have similar needs and desires. Like the supervisor, they want to feel that each man has an equal chance, that there is no personal favoritism in assignment of work and opportunity for promotion. They want to feel free to make suggestions and offer criticism about the way work is handled, and to feel that their suggestions will be given serious consideration. They want, in other words, to be treated in a democratic manner.

Learning the principles of good supervisory practice is relatively simple. Applying them in the everyday work situation, however, is often not so easy. One of the main difficulties is that on the job the supervisor is dealing with people, rather than principles. And people are much harder to

understand than abstract principles—they are much more complicated, and they have feelings and emotions.

What the supervisor can do—and in the long run it will pay off in better work relations, higher morale, increased production—is to recognize some of the reasons why people behave the way they do. The first step in developing this understanding is to learn more about why he himself behaves the way he does. If the foreman who comes in to work feeling down on the world realizes that it's because his wife crumpled the left front fender on the family car and then maneuvered him into a box about how she needs a new winter coat when he tried to bawl her out—well, he will be less likely to blow a fuse and jump all over Joe Jones when Jones spoils a piece of work. Sure, he'll tell Jones off for the boner, but he'll keep it within reason. In other words, he'll bawl Jones out for his mistake, but he won't make poor Jones take the brunt of all the



anger and irritation he feels about what went on at home before he came to work. Recognizing that one has problems which are upsetting helps a person keep those problems in their proper perspective—and prevents them from spilling over and influencing behavior in other areas.

Sometimes, of course, it's not the foreman but the man under him who brings his personal problems to work with him. It may be financial worry, worry over a member of his family who is sick, or any one of the thousands of lesser troubles that are apt to make a person feel out of sorts and unable to do as good a job as usual. This doesn't give him a license to be disagreeable, to take out his gripes on his fellow-workers, nor does it excuse poor work. But if he can feel that his supervisor sees him as a human being, not just a work-producing machine, but a person who has his own life to lead and his own private worries—he will be better able to maintain a proper perspective. If Jones comes in with

a chip on his shoulder because the neighbors kept him up late with a loud party and then told him off when he complained about the noise, it's very easy for him to transfer his frustrated anger to the foreman or some fellow-worker. On the other hand, if the people he works with realize that he's had a rough night and let him know, either by their words or their attitude, that they know it, Jones is going to be able to see that it's only his neighbors he's angry with, not the whole world.

Recognizing that other people have problems, and not taking their resulting gruffness personally, helps to maintain good relationships in the working group. But there are other situations where special handling is called for. Every foreman and supervisor knows that there are workers who are problems, workers nobody can seem to handle properly, chronic absentees, men who stir up trouble with other fellows in the shop. Selected studies have shown that more people are discharged from their

jobs for social than occupational incompetence—in other words, it wasn't that they couldn't do the work, but they just couldn't get along with the other people on the job. Either that or they were always having accidents, or out sick half the time.

What can the foreman or supervisor do in such a case if the usual disciplinary and other measures do not seem to work? He knows the man has a family to support, so he tries to overlook some things, or to talk to the man like a "Dutch Uncle" and give him some good advice. With many individual problems this just makes things worse, and the point soon comes when the man must be discharged in order to prevent chaos in the shop. The moral of the story is plain. If a man tells you he has a severe pain in his lower right abdomen, you don't try to treat it. You suggest that he go see a physician—in the health unit at work if your plant has one, or his own family doctor. Similarly, you are not a psychiatrist, and you haven't had the

training to treat people with emotional problems. Trying to be an amateur psychiatrist usually results in drastic trouble—for you, the man you're trying to help, and everybody else around him. The best thing to do in such cases is to refer the man to someone who is professionally equipped to help him. If you work in a larger plant, there probably is an employee counselor who knows about the resources in your community—mental hygiene clinics, family agencies, etc.—and can make arrangements for professional help. Refer the man to the employee counselor. Some plants have staff physicians and even staff psychiatrists who will be able to help the man directly. But if your plant is small and does not have these facilities, you can suggest that the man see his family doctor who will know how to handle the case or make arrangements for specialist care.

This business of referring an emotionally disturbed person for special treatment may sound like

a simple procedure. Actually, it is not. It takes a lot of tact and understanding. You can't go up to a man and say, "Joe, the way you're acting around here, nobody can live with you. I think you need to see a psychiatrist. Better talk with the employee counselor about it." Joe might punch you in the nose and tell you in no uncertain terms what he thinks of you—and you'd probably deserve it. He certainly would not be inclined to take your advice and, even if he did, he would approach treatment with a chip on his shoulder which would make it that much harder for the physician or psychiatrist to help him. Another thing, don't use this gambit as a weapon when one of your men is being a little irritating or when you're simmering away inside yourself. You don't "accuse" someone of having a cold—don't "accuse" anyone of having emotional problems.

The basis for making a good referral when a man needs help with his emotional problems is the same

as in setting the stage for a mentally healthy work situation under normal conditions—mutual respect and understanding. We're all of us human beings trying to get along the best we know how. The other person has the same kind of feelings we do. So, in looking for the best time or way to suggest that a person with serious problems seek treatment, try to put yourself in his shoes. How would you like to be approached on such a subject? What would make you feel more comfortable if you were in his position? What would be most likely to convince you that your boss was really interested in you as a person, and that it might be a good idea to see your doctor? All this is much easier, of course, if you have already established a good personal relationship with the people working under you. You know them, they know you, you respect one another, they feel free to talk fairly openly with you about things that trouble them. And when the problem seems to be one that the man can't find





an answer for, you can suggest as tactfully as possible, that he might want to talk to an expert who could give him help.

Of course this good personal relationship between the supervisor and his men which is the basis for making a proper referral in the case of an employee with emotional problems, is really the basis of what we have been discussing throughout this booklet—the creation of a healthy work environment, in which each man has a place and in which he can gain self-respect and understanding through his co-operation with, respect for, and understanding of his fellow-workers.

In such an environment, men can work together harmoniously and yet each man remains a separate individual, with his own individual differences and his own unique personality. This is of primary importance. We cannot expect men to become mere cogs in a machine and still be men enough to be able to run the machine.

If you would like to learn more about mental health and its application in industry, you may be interested in the following references. Perhaps other supervisors in your plant may want to get together with you to discuss these matters. Experts are available to serve as discussion leaders for such study groups. A list of possible sources of discussion leaders is included following the references below.

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SOURCES OF DISCUSSION LEADERS:

There are several different sources from which trained discussion leaders can be secured in your own community. Some of these sources are:

1. Adult education services may be offered by your local public school system—consult the local principal or superintendent of schools.
2. The local health department may have a health educator or other person on its staff who would be available to lead discussion groups.

3. Local mental hygiene societies, which are voluntary citizens' organizations, can supply trained leaders. To find out whether there is such a society in your area, write to the National Association for Mental Health, 10 Columbus Circle, New York 19, New York.

4. Some school systems employ psychologists, guidance personnel, or social workers who are trained to lead discussion groups—consult your local school officials for information.

5. Staff members of local mental health clinics, family service agencies, and other social service organizations are usually available to lead mental health discussion groups—consult your local health department for names and addresses of these agencies.

Other possible sources of discussion leaders are:

1. Most of the larger universities conduct adult education services as part of their university extension service. Write to the colleges or universities in your State for further information.

2. The health educator in your State department of health or department of mental hygiene is available for consultation on how to organize and conduct discussion groups.

3. In addition to the above resources, trained personnel throughout the country are available for consultation on how to lead discussion groups. For names and addresses of such persons nearest your locality, write to the National Training Laboratory in Group Development, National Education Association, 1201 Sixteenth Street NW., Washington 6, D.C.

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